

Trump Can Still Lead Without a Third Term

By Victor Davis Hanson

You know, one of the most popular topics in the media is President Donald Trump is now a lame duck, even though he has basically a full term of four years.

But if you read The Washington Post, even The Wall Street Journal, but especially The New York Times, the question is, can MAGA survive after Trump steps down? In other words, if I were to decode that, it was, "Please, please let's end these crazy MAGA people because Trump won't be around."



There's arguments on both sides whether a popular movement can survive its creators. Obviously, the

tea party from which MAGA drew a lot of its ideas as well as the candidacy of Ron Paul—the three candidacies, I should say—did not survive. Or it was incorporated or absorbed into MAGA. But it didn't survive because it didn't have a leader.

Ronald Reagan he had a particular conservative strain of Republicanism that when he ran on two prior occasions, they said he wouldn't be elected. He's too conservative. Yet, when he stepped down, he proved that Reaganism was a very effective political ideology.

And what happened? His handpicked successor, George H.W. Bush, almost as soon as he came into power, he said, "Read my lips. No new taxes." And he raised taxes. And then you remember what he said? He said, "I want a kinder, gentler nation." Nancy Reagan, the first former first lady, said, "Kinder and gentler than whom? Us?" So he didn't really continue Reaganism.

[Bill Clinton](#) hit upon—I think partly with the input of Mark Penn, Dick Morris, Doug Schoen—a centrist Democratic way of government. Maybe it wasn't as centrist as we think but it was pretty left-wing. But they were able to pass it off as centrist. It was a winning formula. Al Gore won the popular vote in 2000 to succeed him.

And what did [Barack Obama](#) do? He repudiated Clintonism and the Democratic Leadership Council. And he went hard to the Left. And the result of that is we got a destroyed or an irrelevant Democratic Party.

So, when Trump steps down, there's all of these arguments, pro and con, that MAGA will or will not survive. Florida Gov. [Ron DeSantis](#) is a very effective governor. He had a sweeping victory in 2022. He embraced the MAGA agenda. And his argument was, "You can have MAGA but without the Trump legal liabilities." But he wasn't able to capture the popular imagination.

I'll leave you with one last thought. Donald Trump has been trolling the media. In March he said—they asked him, "Would you like a third term?" "Uh, no. You know, you can't do it. But my lawyers are working on it. They're looking at it."

What he meant was the 22nd Amendment that was passed in 1951,

right before the ascension of Dwight Eisenhower—no president shall be elected for more than two terms. No president shall be elected twice.

That was a Republican reaction. They controlled the Congress for two of the four terms of FDR. It's kind of ironic because Dwight Eisenhower would've been elected a third time probably and beat John F. Kennedy if he could have run a third time. But his party had precluded that idea right before he became president.

A lot of presidents think about it. Every successful president, the topic comes up. It came up with Reagan. It came up with Clinton. Obama, remember, said, "I'd like to phone in a third term, if I didn't have to do the work." He also said he was lazy. He confessed to that. Maybe that was why.

But here's my point. Trump was not serious at the time. He just wanted to either troll the press and media or he wanted to dispel the idea that he was a lame duck and just throw it out there that maybe he could be president a third time. Because if you look at the language of the 22nd Amendment, it doesn't say you can't hold office twice. It says you can't be elected.

Perhaps he could get a vice president—he could run as vice president. The president could resign. And then, he would take over and hold office three times but not be elected. That was all fantasy. He was never going to do that. No voter would vote for a president to step down.

Here's my point, again. [Donald Trump](#) was trolling and he knows what makes the Left angry and confuses. And the worst thing that they fear is a third term. But just this May—just recently he was asked that question again. He said, "Of course I'm not gonna run for a third term. And who's going to be the standard-bearer? I don't know. I don't wanna pick them. But we have an obvious vice president who's a firm believer in MAGA.

And we have Marco Rubio, a successful secretary of state, who could also serve.”

But the point, again, is he raised the question, “Will this MAGA doctrine continue after I leave? Will there be sunshine after the sun is gone?” In other words, to use a simile. And he’s saying, “I’m gonna be around. I’m gonna be a senior statesman. I’m going to endorse somebody. And I’m gonna ensure that that person, by the force of my ex-presidency and influence, shall abide by MAGA doctrines.”

So no, Donald Trump is not going to seek a third term. And yes, I think the MAGA ideology of the Republican Party will stay with us for the near future.

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